

Quality still counts in rare-coin market

By Roger Boye

Hobby experts are predicting that quality rare coins will go up in value during 1989, much as they did last year, while rarities worn from use might languish in the marketplace.

"In almost all cases, top investment-grade coins outperformed those in the lower condition categories," said Robert E. Wilhite, editor of Numismatic News. "That situation should continue this year."

Wilhite compiles his newspaper's weekly coin-market index, which indicates that rare

coins in choice condition—such as "MS-65"—advanced nearly 22 percent in value during 1988. (The pros rank uncirculated coins on an 11-point scale ranging from "MS-60"—sometimes called "mint state-typical"—to "MS-70" for "mint state-perfect"; MS-65 is considered investment quality.)

Similarly, a survey by the hobby newspaper Coin World suggests that MS-65 coins spurted 26.75 percent in value in 1988. By comparison, the Dow Jones Industrial Average went up 11.85 percent (plus dividends) during 1988, while gold dropped

15.24 percent in value and silver dropped 10.15 percent.

Meanwhile, Harlan J. Berk, president of Harlan J. Berk Ltd. at 31 N. Clark St. in Chicago, said he believes ancient coins (his specialty) are underpriced. Also worth buying are U.S. gold coins from the late 1800s and early 1900s that are selling for just a modest amount above their "bullion value."

But Berk added that he thinks it's wrong to "hawk coins as investments."

"We sell them as collectibles. If there's inflation, good coins should go up over the long haul."